

## TIGHT TANDEM WALKING ON A LINE OR BEAM

A tight tandem walk is one in which the heel of one foot is placed directly in front of and touching the toe of the other. This activity is one of the most difficult in the program. It's tough but not impossible. Because of the narrow base of support, it takes both good balance and leg strength. Plan to work with one person at a time.

You might use this activity as a test in week 2 (when even two steps on a line are difficult) and then again in week 16 to measure improvements. The changes will be remarkable, with all they have learned. These kinds of changes build confidence, and can help prevent falls to the side. Self-efficacy experts say that nothing builds confidence like achieving something that has been difficult in the past.

### ***Benefits »***

- ⦿ Strengthens hip abductors and adductors for reduced fall risk.
- ⦿ Practices dynamic balance over a narrow base of support.
- ⦿ Uses visual targets.
- ⦿ Requires cognitive skills; participants practice making and executing their plan.
- ⦿ Builds confidence.

### ***Set It Up »***

Put down a 12-foot (3.5-meter) line beside a handrail. Alternatively, perhaps there is a line in the carpet that you can use; just make sure balance support is nearby. There's no shame in everyone using a walker at first. It will be that much easier to learn the foot work. This activity should be done with just one person at a time, with yourself nearby. You might lock forearms with them or hold both hands the first few times. You will be walking backward in front of them. It also helps if you hold their hands up a bit and out to the side.

### ***How to Do It »***

The ultimate task is to walk heel-touches-toe style down the line. Describe and model a tandem step. Participants can do an easier pattern, if they like, by having their feet land farther apart. The goal is that it just needs to be challenging. Consider reminding them of ABLE Bodies tools they've learned previously. They may think of some themselves. That would be better. Then let them make their own plan about how they will walk this challenging line.

- ⦿ Remind participants of similar activities you've already done successfully with them, such as The Straight and Narrow, Eyes on the Prize, and Holiday Lines (see Walk the Line).
- ⦿ They should plan for a stabilized torso, aligned posture, and soft knees.
- ⦿ They should look ahead using a visual target at horizon level or at least look 8 feet (2.5 meters) ahead.
- ⦿ They might hold their arms out to the sides (if comfortable).
- ⦿ With each step they will be moving their torso forward toward the new supporting leg—belly button walking. Cue them to be aware of each transition.
- ⦿ They should find a pace that works for them. A little faster is generally easier.
- ⦿ Rhythm adds symmetry and cadence.
- ⦿ My, oh my, look at all the tools they have to help them do great! (Really!)

### ***Get Started »***

For the first few passes, just get the hang of it. Focus on one or two tools at a time from the previous list. Little by little, participants will do better. They will keep improving one step at a time. Soon they'll have done far better than they ever would have thought.

### ***Give It More Balance »***

- Have participants sing, recite a poem, or do simple math problems as they walk.
- Have them carry a mug filled with water. No spilling!
- Dim the lights or have them wear sunglasses.
- Use a flashlight to get their gaze farther ahead.
- Have them walk on a poly beam. Participants should feel comfortable with the beam and willing to try. Many won't want to try until they see a friend do it. Let them know their trusty walker is welcome as they cross the beam. Only let them try the challenges that they're 90 percent sure they can do. Encourage them to use as much balance support as they want. Support and praise their choices.

### ***Keep It Safe »***

Adequate balance support may be a challenge. Tight tandem walking could be difficult for almost anyone. Always provide plenty of balance support, including walkers. Consider having participants share walkers if you need extras. Make sure you only send one participant across at a time, and be there yourself to hold hands, catch a misstep, inspire, and give cues. Participants should make a plan before they start; that is, recall ideas that will help them, and then do the best they can. This and the other Walk the Line activities (see page 312) should be fun and used occasionally for special days. Participants seem to really like the single line and balance beam kinds of challenges; but they do require extra supervision.

### ***Live It »***

What will be your participants' chosen path? Visual targeting really helps with all kinds of line challenges. Practice at line challenges improves their balance over a narrow base of support and will strengthen muscles related to lateral balance. These attributes may help prevent devastating falls to the side, so practice, practice, practice. Use the tools! Participants should keep soft knees; use a stable, upright posture; use visual targets; find a rhythm; feel each transition; and glue each foot to the ground (figuratively, of course) when crossing a beam or line.